

New Latin-American Stardom, the local/global stars of Latin American Cinema's new
"Golden Age": Sônia Braga, Gael García Bernal, and Ricardo Darín

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Editors' Introduction

The Latin American star system, like that in other regions, has emulated the Hollywood model in large measure because of its power to mobilize movie-going audiences. Various contributors to this collection have underscored particular ways in which regional film cultures have borrowed certain of Hollywood's strategies to promote local star culture. Maite Conde's discussion of fan magazines in Brazil in the 1920s (see Chapter 5), for instance, provides an early example of the ways the Hollywood star paradigm self-consciously served local interests in shaping a Brazilian national audience. Similarly, in Chapter 23 Alejandro Kelly's focus on photography in star construction and the commercial promotion of particular stars helps us better appreciate the rich visual influence of cinema in shaping popular tastes and commodity culture in the region.

In recent decades, with seminal works by Viera, López, Paranaguá and Tuñón, Latin American star studies have expanded their scope, generating sophisticated discourses on the ways in which individual stars maneuver their celebrity persona within the social, cultural and even moral projects of national and transnational communities. The authors of this chapter argue for a substantive alteration of that meta-discourse on stardom in which key Latin America actors are seen as not merely as 'star texts' but, to extend the metaphor, as centers of

‘constellations’ of intermedial artistic and market networks in ways that transcend their status as mere entertainers. While defined by the box-office, their real value lies in the ways these contemporary icons engage in forms of ethnic identity politics, thereby displacing old stereotypes on international screens. Sônia Braga, for instance, incorporates her Brazilianness into a liminal hemispheric identity that is sensual yet also political; Ricardo Darín, whose career trajectory is built on the merging of Argentina and Spanish film markets, provides an update to an earlier trope: the male star or ‘galán’, now at middle-age; finally, Gael García Bernal anchors his star persona in his Mexicanness while forging a chameleon persona for a whole range of political themes that reflect and define contemporary Latin American cultural and political concerns. Notably, all three of these ‘new’ stars occupy the porous media space that enables them to move between mainstream commercial cinema in their own countries but also the wider global art-house film circuit.

Once exclusively aimed at mass marketing and publicity apparatuses directed at broad national and international markets, today’s Latin American stars pose a much more nuanced political and social persona as they reflect the trajectory of recent cinema from the region, moving across geopolitical borders and enjoying recognition both within mass-markets as well as art-house cinema circles. As a result, stardom is no longer the extraneous marketing supplement to films from Latin America it once was.

This chapter analyzes contemporary film stardom in Latin America through three stars who represent not just a gender and geographical sweep of the continent

(Mexican Gael García Bernal, Argentine Ricardo Darín, and Brazilian Sônia Braga), but also the key discourses that define how Latin American stardom currently works. Although this chapter relates these discourses to individual stars and their careers, it also acknowledges that these concepts apply as well to other contemporary Latin American stars (Salma Hayek, Wagner Moura).

Existing scholarship suggests Latin American stardom is defined in four key ways; regionally, transnationally ethnically and televisually. Firstly, as Ana M. López (1994) points out, Latin America's stars have historically been regional stars, appealing to the shared values and tastes of a pan-continental audience stretching between Latin America and the Spanish speaking United States. Secondly, and both historically and in the contemporary era, stardom is also defined transnationally and in trans-Atlantic contexts, expanding to include the US and Spain in a star system (and co-production models) that ensures the financial viability and distribution of Spanish language films (see Ruétalo in this chapter). Thirdly, Latin American and Latino/a stardom is further determined by the production and circulation of films in the United States and by the particular racial and ethnic negotiations that fit within the racial hierarchies of Latin America and the United States (**López, 1998; Beltrán 2009; Tierney, 2012**). Lastly, another key element in Latin American stardom and equally important to the early careers of Braga Darín and Bernal is the role television plays in determining stardom in national contexts. This is particularly the case in Latin American television's most popular format, the *telenovela*, which is how our three stars initially found fame. In Mexico and Brazil, for example, the national star system is defined principally by actors from this format. But across the continent stardom may also be further determined when established *telenovela* stars (like Braga

or Moura) move on to work in national film industries and then subsequently transnationally (in Hollywood or Europe).

This notion of nationally defined televisual stardom, which then shifts into national filmmaking and beyond, is also exemplified by other contemporary Latin American stars. Like Braga who became a star with *Gabriela* (1975) Mexican actress Hayek, also achieved stardom in a *telenovela* (*Teresa* 1989), before moving into film in Mexico (*Callejón de los Milagros*, *Midaq Alley*, Jorge Fons 1995) and simultaneously to the US where she became a star through a variety of film and television projects including both acting and producing roles (*Frida* Julie Taymor, 2002; *Ugly Betty* 2006-2010; *30 Rock* 2009-2013). This chapter's selection of Braga, Darín and Bernal over other contemporary Latin American stars like Hayek, Brazilian Moura or Argentine Federico Luppi is a strategic one. It represents the three major industries in Latin America (Mexico, Brazil and Argentina), and a sweep that is both gender (two men and two women –Alice Braga is also studied alongside her aunt) and generationally based. Braga comes from an earlier generation of Latin American stars, of the 1970s whereas Darín and Bernal come from the post-2000 boom – even though Darín, like Braga, is middle aged. Additionally, these three actors' star texts and careers mobilize *both* existing (regional, transnational and ethnic) and emergent discourses of Latin American stardom: the abandonment of the local/shift into the global and eventual return (Braga), the tension between art house and mainstream cinema, national and international stardom (Darín) and ethnic stardom (Bernal). Moreover, the choice of stars focused on is further determined by the fact that most of them appeared in Latin America's major art house successes. In addition to precipitating a still ongoing new "Golden Age" for Latin American Cinema, it is our

contention that these successes have shaped the forms their subsequent stardom has taken: Braga in *Cidade de Deus/City of God* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002), Darín in *Nueve Reinas/Nine Queens* (Fabián Bielinsky 2000) and Bernal in *Amores perros/ Love's a Bitch* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000), *Y tu mamá también* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001), *El crimen del padre Amaro/The Crime of Padre Amaro* (Carlos Carrera 2003) and *Diarios de motocicleta/ Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles 2004).

Sônia Braga

Roberto Carlos Ortiz

Sônia Braga is arguably the most important movie star produced by Brazilian cinema. In the 1980s, the actress became the Brazilian movie star with most international projection since Carmen Miranda in 1940s Hollywood cinema. Despite lengthy absences from Brazilian productions, Braga is still considered a Brazilian cinema star and has taken part in more emblematic film and TV projects than Miranda. Whereas her predecessor's glamorous star image in Brazilian radio was replaced with the tropicalized stereotypes in her Hollywood musicals (**López, 1993**), Braga's star image has remained tied to her work in Brazilian media. The press often calls her "the eternal Gabriela," after the 1975 Rede Globo soap opera that first made her a national star, or "the Spider Woman," after the 1985 Brazilian/US co-production credited with consolidating her international stardom. Notwithstanding her uneven trajectory, Braga's lengthy career in Brazilian and US cinema and television offers an interesting case study about changing paradigms in post-classical stardom.

On April 2016, Braga attended the Cannes Film Festival premiere of *Aquarius* (Kleber Mendonça Filho), her first starring role in Brazilian cinema since *Tieta do Agreste* (Carlos Diegues, 1996). The 65-year-old actress was the star attraction at the red carpet event, dazzling photographers in a stylish gown by famed Cuban-American designer Narciso Rodríguez. At the steps of the Grand Théâtre Lumière, the event took a political turn when cast and crew pulled out signs denouncing the ousting of Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff. Braga joined her colleagues and helped to hold a sign that read: “A coup took place in Brazil.” The *Aquarius* screening earned a lengthy standing ovation and Braga’s performance became a critical favorite. However, the protest provoked a social media backlash in Brazil, including a Twitter campaign with the hashtag #BoicoteAquarius. Braga’s Facebook page was filled with nasty comments that questioned her right to protest since the actress has been living in the United States. Weeks later, the newly appointed Minister of Culture, Marcelo Calero, also criticized the Cannes protest, claiming on Brazilian TV that it damaged the country’s image abroad. In response, Braga wrote a “history lesson” on her Facebook page that informed the 33-year-old Minister of her contributions to Brazil’s international image: “[A] Brazilian actress was Brazilian cinema’s box-office champion and held that title for 30 years – also winning, with Brazilian films, besides international projection, many awards abroad, that way promoting the name of Brazil and of our culture” (Braga 2016).

INSERT Figure 11.1 HERE

Scholarly articles on Braga have emphasized the construction of her star text, especially her image as a Brazilian sex symbol, in relation to issues about race, sexuality and nation (**Dennison and Shaw 2004, Da Silva 2014, Legg 2015**).

Looking beyond the intertextual star images, more recent star studies have considered

the evolving media contexts in which stars must work to remain relevant. In “Re-examining Stardom,” **Christine Geraghty (2000)** proposes a distinction between three kinds of contemporary stardom: celebrity, professional and performer. Braga has mostly worked within the star-as-professional category, which is akin to classic Hollywood studio star system. The Brazilian actress has given audiences a more or less consistent star image through her work in different media contexts. Since Hollywood has generally represented the ideal for movie stardom, the success of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Hector Babenco) is generally credited with Braga’s international stardom. After reviewing her career in Brazilian film and television, however, *Kiss* seems more like a turning point than a launching pad into international stardom.

Braga made her professional debut with the São Paulo staging of *Hair* (1969), which led to small parts in underground cinema and a starring role in the musical literary adaptation *A Moreninha/The Little Brunette* (Glauro Mirkó Laurelli, 1970). Her rise to stardom, however, happened under contract to Rede Globo. Braga first became known as cast member of the Brazilian version of *Sesame Street* (1972) and as supporting actress in trailblazing soap operas. She achieved full stardom and sex symbol status with the title role in *Gabriela* (1975), an adaptation of a bestselling Jorge Amado novel that was part of Rede Globo’s strategy to elevate their programming quality. With her small stature, big smile and long frizzy “wild hair,” Braga as Gabriela offered viewers a more accessible ideal of Brazilian beauty, overcoming criticism for naturally lacking the literary character’s “clove and cinnamon” skin color (and achieving it instead through a mix of suntans and makeup). Gabriela’s childlike behavior and earthy sexuality endeared her to viewers. In the

soap opera's most famous scene, a barefooted Gabriela climbs to grab a child's kite caught on a tiled roof while town members congregate below to watch and cheer. Oblivious to the impropriety of her action and to the desires she awakens, Gabriela is only concerned with bringing the kite down to stop a child from crying.

In 1976 came the widely publicized theatrical release of *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos/Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* (Bruno Barreto, 1976), a big-budget adaptation of another Jorge Amado bestseller. Braga's (brief) sex scenes were highly anticipated after the film's publicized problems with censors. The advertising catered to the viewers of low-budget sex comedies with female nudity (*pornochanchadas*) that dominated the national box-office during the period of the right wing dictatorship. One poster showed Braga in bed with her two male costars, smiling with her arms over their necks and her naked legs crossed. The tag line played on the double entendre of the verb *dar* (to give): "Ela dá a receita certa para amar dois homens" / "She 'gives' the correct recipe to love two men." Released on November 1976, *Dona Flor* held (until late 2010) the record for most ticket sales by a national film.

Two years later, the sexually explicit *A Dama do Lotação/Lady on the Bus* (Neville D'Almeida, 1978), told the story of Solange (Braga), a frigid upper-class woman who, after being raped by her husband on their wedding night, starts picking up men on local buses for sex. Ostensibly a Brazilian *Belle de Jour* (Luis Buñuel, 1967), adapted from a Nelson Rodrigues story, the movie's contradictory messages about female sexuality (Buckley, 1998) make it Braga's most ideologically muddled star vehicle. Critics panned the movie, but *A Dama* was the first Brazilian film to premiere

simultaneously around the country and to sell a million tickets in its initial week.

Advertised with a poster that only showed the glammed-up star provocatively dressed in red, *A Dama* established Braga as Brazil's "box-office queen".

Braga's stardom began to assume an international dimension during this period, when Rede Globo started to export their soap operas and Embrafilme (Brazil's national film company) offered financial assistance for the US release of *Dona Flor*, which fit their plans to support "quality films that will also have mass appeal" (Lifsher 1977 B11). *Gabriela* was the first Brazilian *novela* broadcast in Portugal and became a national phenomenon. The following year, news of *Dona Flor*'s box-office success in the United States traveled to Brazil. Marketed as an erotic comedy for art house audiences, the film was the most successful Latin American release in the US and Braga's sensual image – "a heavy-lidded, full-lipped beauty that moves from timid girl to ripe woman without a blemish" (Christiansen 1978: A6) – even impressed critics who disliked the movie.

Eu te amo/ I Love You (Arnaldo Jabor, 1981) was the first Braga film to screen at Cannes, during the "Un Certain Regard" sidebar. After watching it there, *Newsweek*'s film critic ecstatically proclaimed Braga "the first true post-Sophia Loren star, a woman of blazing beauty who combines the comic verve of Carole Lombard with a courageous sexual explicitness" (Kroll 1982: 83).

With the international success of *Eu te amo*, Braga seemed poised to fulfill her desire to promote Brazilian cinema abroad: "I want more than international stardom for myself, (...) I want Brazilian cinema to become a star" (Wolf 1982). Even though it

fared better abroad, *Gabriela* (Bruno Barreto, 1984), an MGM and United Artists production that paired her with Italian superstar Marcello Mastroianni, lacked the soap opera's charm and failed to repeat *Dona Flor*'s success. Taking part in the promotional campaign for *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985), filmed in English, increased her international visibility, but Braga's parts were secondary to the two male leads (Oscar-winning William Hurt and Raul Julia). Still, Braga maintained her international star image through extra cinematic elements, like being a jury member at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival or presenting at the 1987 Oscars ceremony. After moving to New York City, Braga began to work mostly in the United States.

As a Brazilian woman with imperfect English, a former soap opera actress who posed nude for *Playboy*, a sex symbol in her mid-30s, Braga defied 1980s Hollywood movie star standards. Within Hollywood's Eurocentric casting norms, her light skin and dark hair meant she could portray only multiple Latin American nationalities, but she had to contend with being typecast as a Latina and older character. Since turning 40, Braga was often cast in Latina mother roles that suppressed the sensuality that had been the basis of her star image since *Gabriela* and *Dona Flor*. Her best opportunities have all been as guest star on popular TV series like *Sex and the City* (2001), *Alias* (2005) and *Brothers and Sisters* (2010). Though she has regularly traveled back to Brazil, Braga frequent absences from Brazilian cinema and television have become a recurring question in frequent TV interviews.

On February 2003, Sônia Braga posed next to her niece Alice Braga at a Manhattan screening of *Cidade de Deus* which premiered to critical acclaim at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival and went on to earn major Oscar nominations with the backing of

distributor Miramax Pictures. Though she played only a supporting role, the 19-year-old Alice Braga was chosen to promote *Cidade de Deus* abroad and her image – kissing a young black man while dressed in a bikini – was featured on the US poster. Almost twenty years earlier, her aunt Sônia had been asked to promote the international release of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, which also successfully premiered at Cannes before becoming the first Latin American film nominated for multiple Oscars (including Best Picture). The Sônia and Alice Braga photo thus symbolically linked two periods – late 1970s to mid-1980s and late 1990s to mid-2000s – of renewed international interest in Brazilian cinema after the Cinema Novo movement of the 1960s.

The mobility between countries and genres and Latino visibility in the media has increased significantly since Braga's move to the United States in the 1980s. There has been a shift in the mode of stardom among the younger generation of international Brazilian movie stars. Stars-as-performers like Moura do not attempt to build a consistent star image through their diverse roles. They emphasize the acting work – like gaining weight and learning Spanish for *Narcos* (2015) – and draw attention away from their personal lives. This approach has allowed them to play more diverse roles, but their star images so far lack the mythical quality of their predecessor. And although they became known through their work in films, as of 2016 Brazil's younger international film stars are attached to US television projects.

Gael García Bernal: Updating Ethnic Stardom and Mobility

Dolores Tierney

Gael García Bernal's stardom has been determined from its beginnings by border crossings. His early film roles, *Amores perros/ Love's a Bitch* (2000), *Y tu mamá también/ And Your Mother Too* (2001) that had relatively huge *cross-over* success in the United States and Europe, catapulted him from national prominence and what would have been a small art house circuit to Hollywood/global stardom *before* he had appeared in any major English language roles. This border crossing and cross-over appeal has necessarily produced a certain kind of "ethnic stardom" that continues through his more contemporary roles. By ethnic stardom I mean the trans-border positioning of his identity as a Latin American in the Hollywood film industry and US imaginary and the ways Gael fits into the formation of stardom for US audiences even though his early career and critically successful roles (until *Mozart in the Jungle*) happened largely elsewhere.

In order to understand the dynamics of his ethnic stardom, we might productively contrast his career outside of Mexico with that of the earlier experiences of another Mexican actor, Pedro Armendáriz, who played a variety of different ethnicities during his Hollywood career including: Turkish, Mongol, Cuban, and Cherokee but only consistently played his own Mexican ethnicity in John Ford films –as a Mexican in *The Fugitive* (1948) and Mexican-American in *Three Godfathers* (1948) and *Fort Apache* (1948) (**Tierney 2012**). Unlike Armendáriz's 'otherness', performed exclusively within the Hollywood industry, Gael achieves a transnational star status even before entering the Hollywood star constellation and, ironically, does not appear in an American film until the lead role in the recent *Rosewater* (Jon Stewart, 2014). Notably, he has yet to play the role of a Mexican in a fully "Hollywood" film -- although he has played Mexican characters in the co-production *La casa de mi padre*

(Matt Piedmont 2012 Pantelion/Lionsgate) and in the independent *Babel* (González Iñárritu, 2006). Nonetheless, he occupies a unique variation of Mexican cinematic identity in Hollywood, presenting Taymor's *Frida* as one of the nominees for Best Picture at the 2003 Oscar's ceremony, and posing for an interview for *People*, --a prominent US publication in 2004-- (Sánchez Prado 2013: 147). In effect, his career seems to have updated the kind of ethnic stardom that characterized Armendáriz, and by analogy, earlier Americanized Latin American actors, including Carmen Miranda, Fernando Lamas etc., by virtue of a series of transnational media connections.

To add a further layer of complexity to his ethnic stardom, we note how it is often Latin American/Spanish directors who have called on Gael to play different (Latin American) others, albeit directors funded by US (Sundance) and European (Film Four, Canal+, TVE) institutions. As these films circulate in the US through art-house circuits, they reinforce the interstitial nature of his unique updating of ethnic stardom. Viewing his career in these terms, we are better able to appreciate the importance of his winning a coveted Golden Globe in 2016 for his portrayal of Rodrigo de Souza, the conductor of the fictional New York Symphony in *Mozart in the Jungle*, the Amazon Prime series that also won the Golden Globe for Best Comedy. Gael's win was a fitting climax to the previous two years of continued (ethnic) and transnational mobility. These have included sitting on the prestigious jury of the Cannes Film Festival and starring as a mysterious forest dwelling activist in *El Ardor* (Pablo Fendrik, Argentina, 2014), which also showed at the festival. He has starred as a migrant in *Desierto/ The Desert* (Jonas Cuarón, 2015) a chase thriller set in the New Mexico desert and has had a new term coined (by Daniela Cabrera of the digital publisher *Remezcla*) for his own press coverage: "Gaelindura" (Chavez, 2014). A play

on words *Gaelindura* translates literally as “pretty Gael” but it could also be taken to mean “Gael-appeal.”

INSERT Figure 11.2 HERE

From his film debut in the critically and commercially successful *Amores perros* followed by major roles in three of the region’s other highest grossing films -- *Y tu mamá también*, *El crimen del padre Amaro* and *Diarios de motocicleta*-- Gael (whose individuality is highlighted by the fact that he is often referred to by just his first name) has been credited with “creating a buzz around [not just] Mexico’s new cinema” but also contributing hugely to the successes of a new wave of Latin American cinema of the early 2000s (De la Mora 2006: 169). These four successful films roles in a four-year period launched him to global (Hollywood) stardom.

Since appearing in *Diarios de motocicleta* and *La mala educación/Bad Education* (Pedro Almodóvar, Spain, 2004) in the same year, Gael has continued to move between acting projects in Mexico (*Rudo y Cursi* Carlos Cuarón 2008), France (*La science des rêves, The Science of Sleep*, Michel Gondry 2006), Spain (*También la lluvia/Even the Rain* Icíar Bollaín, 2010) and the US (*Babel; Letters to Juliette*, Gary Winick 2010; *La casa de mi padre/The House of My Father; Mammoth* Lukas Moodyssen 2009; *Rosewater, A little Bit of Heaven* Nicole Kassell 2011). As a result of this multiplicity of national and transnational contexts in which he works and his “performance of characters from diverse national and cultural origins” Gael’s stardom, Ignacio Sánchez Prado argues, has become “deterritorialized” into a kind of “post-Mexico” Mexicanness (2013: 148).

In casting Gael in a variety of different Latin nationalities, Salles, Larraín, and Bollaín are likely tapping in to Gael's regional/transnational appeal as well as the financial/box office security of his star status brings, whilst simultaneously catering to the homogenizing tendencies of their US and European backers. Despite his presumed deterritorialization, Gael's stardom is never completely dislocated from his Mexicanness or Latin Americanness and never de-racialized or de-ethnified. His unbordered stardom might facilitate his deliberate de-racination from any national bonds in films like the English language *Mammoth*, which is set in a variety of international locations (New York, Bangkok) and made by a Swedish director. Conversely, these dislocations also facilitate his successful mimicking of Argentine (*Diarios de motocicleta*) Spanish (*La mala educación*) and Chilean accents (*¡No!* and *Neruda* Pablo Larraín). These country-specific performances are balanced by the allegorical *Blindness* (Fernando Meirelles, 2008), in which Gael's non-specific Latin Americanness (along with a number of other features) is important in anchoring the film in a Latin American context.

There is of course, another way to interpret the variety of ethnicities and nationalities in Gael's career; in relation to the notion of ethnic stardom. The variety of non-white nationalities (excepting of course his Frenchness in *The Science of Sleep*), which Gael and other Mexican actors before him were called upon to perform, could be considered emblematic of the practice of homogenising all "others:" as in Hollywood's predominantly Eurocentric vision, "otherness" is not considered significant in itself and is therefore interchangeable.

Taking into consideration the history of Latino/a American representation in Hollywood, Gael's most recent role (*Mozart in the Jungle*) represents progress in the US/Hollywood's ethnic representation. In the second season his character is defined as specifically Mexican, whereas in the first season he was presented as a pan-Latin American who had a Brazilian/Portuguese sounding last name (De Souza), drank mate and was sound tracked by a number of different "Latin" musical genres including samba. That he can play his own ethnicity in a US project suggests a progressive shift in Gael's stardom as it is conceived in the United States. A further progression in the future would be if he gets to perform a character whose ethnicity is not an issue or merely to continue to play his own ethnicity (Mexican) consistently (as with other ethnic stars like James Cagney, who as a star, constantly played Irish Americans). Although, as Diane Negra points out in *Off-White Hollywood* (2001), even playing ones' own ethnicity does not cancel out Hollywood's tendency to "absorb and commodify" ethnicity (2001: 1).

A key factor in Gael's ethnic Latin-American stardom as it has evolved over time, is the connection to politics and his social commitment. Although not all of his films buttress this aspect of his stardom, political roles are still the ones for which he is most well-known and the ones most mentioned in his star text (Rapkin 2014). In addition to playing a young Che Guevara in the moment of his awakening to radical consciousness in *Diarios de Motocicleta*, and Zahara, a transexual in *La mala educación* abused and silenced by the Catholic Church, he has recently appeared in *Desierto*, as a young migrant hunted by a murderous anti-immigration vigilante, in *Rosewater* as a political prisoner and in *El Ardor* as a mythical Kai fighting developers who seek to destroy the jungle in Northern Argentina. Gael's political

commitments are also clear from the numerous “issues” based films he chooses to act in even though the characters he plays are not, the films emphasize, sympathetically political. In *También la lluvia* for instance, he plays a film director Sebastián who wants to make a historical epic about the colonial era’s mistreatment of indigenous people but balks at getting involved in the contemporary indigenous rights conflict in Bolivia. In *¡No!* he plays advertising executive René Saavedra who successfully sells the “no” campaign in the 1988 plebiscite that ended the Pinochet dictatorship with the same kind of vacuous marketing spiel used to sell a bottle of coke.

Extra-textually, Gael’s stardom is buttressed by political activism that it is frequently cited in press coverage of his films and in interviews (Rickett 2015). But in contradistinction to what Toby Miller suggests in “Why Coldplay Sucks”, (2013) about the political activism of many US and UK stars and celebrities, Gael’s activism amounts to more than a twitter account and paying lip service to causes. He is involved in direct action for issues (principally migration) he is committed to, action that more often than takes the form of cinema related activities: producing and appearing in *¿Quién es Dayani Cristal?* (Marc Silver, 2013), about how tighter border controls are literally killing many Central American migrants attempting the crossing into the United States and producing and part directing *Los invisibles/The Invisible Ones*, (Marc Silver, 2010) about the terrifying and dangerous experiences of Central American migrants crossing through Mexico to the US.

Gael’s political activism is also about allying social causes with the cause of Mexican cinema itself, which he pursues through a variety of producing and directorial projects. In 2006, with fellow Mexican actor Diego Luna and producer Pablo Cruz, set up CANANA Films which produces films that are overwhelmingly focused on

social and political issues. These include Mexican films *Las elegidas* (*The Chosen Ones* David Pablos 2015) –an expose of forced prostitution amongst teenage girls; *Revolución* (2010) –an anthology film that commemorates Mexico’s 1910-1920 Revolution and highlights ongoing instances of social exclusion and marginalization in which Gael directs one of the shorts “Lucio”; and *Miss Bala* (Gerardo Naranjo 2011) about political corruption at the heart of Mexico’s drug wars. As well CANANA co-produced – the Chilean film *¡No!*. Gael also co-founded Ambulante, with Luna and Cruz, the moving festival of documentaries that “promot[es] social and educational concerns” (MacLaird 2013: 68) and is now into its 11th year. In 2007 Gael made his feature film debut with *Déficit*, a film focused on social inequality and the gap between rich and servant classes in Mexico.

A recurring comment in press coverage about Gael focuses on the evident contradictions between his commitment to political and issue-based films and his good looks and sex appeal (**Rapkin 2014; Rickett 2015**). It has been suggested (by seminal theorist of star studies Richard Dyer) however, that such a “degree [of] *opposition or contradiction*” is common in the elements of a star’s signification and that consequently “the star’s image is characterized by attempts to negotiate, reconcile or mask the difference between the elements” (my emphasis 1998: 64). In Gael’s image the reconciliation between sex appeal and politics seems to be worked out through a particular form of ethnic stardom that takes on ideas about Latin America as seen and homogenized from a US perspective. In these terms, his star persona connects his Latin Americanness with an imagined post-1960s’ political radicalism that is particular to Latin America and its history of revolution *and* a more classical

version of Latin stardom: the sensual *Latin lover*. Rather than politics detracting from his sex or Gael appeal, it is crucially defined by his connection to politics.

Indeed, politics and sex appeal are often connected by his much commented upon charisma that is discernible not just in his star persona off-screen but also, and very importantly, in certain *on screen* roles as well, particularly when he plays real life characters famous for their charisma and politics. For instance, at one point in the Robert Redford-commissioned *Diarios de motocicleta*, Gael as the young Ernesto Guevara greets and talks to various stall holders at the market in Temuco, Chile. The effectiveness of these moments in the film in which the stall holders (who, following director Walter Salles' common practice, are played by non-professional actors) appear awkward and bashful as they speak to Ernesto (Gael), relies both on Gael's acting out of Ernesto's legendary charisma (Gonzalez 2004: 1) but also on the actor's own charisma. Gael is and is perceived as simultaneously his real charismatic self (the famous Mexican/Latin American actor) and an actor playing a charismatic historical individual communicating with real people.

Some journalistic accounts (Rapkin 2014; Heawood 2015; Rickett 2015) cite the fact that Gael has not moved to Hollywood to work purely within its parameters as proof of his political credentials and appeal:

He could have taken those good looks, which have barely changed over the years, climbed aboard the Hollywood gravy train and never looked back, but instead he has chosen to make, for the most part, Latin American films. Not just as an actor, Bernal is also a producer,

writer and director, bringing zeal to a range of politically charged human-interest stories (Rickett 2015).

What these accounts perhaps do not take into consideration is that working and residing in Latin America (most recent interviews and articles note he is based between Mexico City and Buenos Aires) (Rapkin 2014: Rickett 2015) is part of the Gael appeal/Gaelindura that fuses politics with his national/regional origins. What happens in season three of *Mozart in the Jungle* out December 2016 however –where, as Rodrigo he plays a good looking, charismatic and unconventional character, who is not (yet) political may mean a renegotiation of the terms on which Gael’s ethnic stardom is based.

The Secret in Ricardo Darín’s Eyes

Victoria Ruétalo

Although, arguably the most important star in contemporary Argentine cinema, Ricardo Darín’s stardom is also defined by a transnational space that is not Hollywood but the Spanish-speaking and global art cinema markets (Garavelli 2015). The star in fact turned down the possibility of a Hollywood career, when he discovered the role on offer was that of a drug dealer in *Man on Fire* (Tony Scott 2004) (Darín 2013). This section looks at the construction of Darín’s stardom in relation to key local elements: Argentine masculinity, the New Argentine Cinema and the tension between his status as an exemplary figure and star of domestic cinema and of international successes. Through close textual analysis of some of his key films including *Nueve reinas*, the metacinematic *Delirium*, *El aura* (*The Aura*), and *el secreto de sus ojos* (*The Secret in Their Eyes*) and their increasingly deliberate

framing that focuses on his expressive eyes and face, I want to argue that his star text is defined as representative of a new era of Argentine masculinity.

Of the 21 features he has starred in since his break through success in *Nueve reinas* sixteen are co-productions, fifteen (including Oscar winning *El secreto de sus ojos* (Campanella 2009) have Spain as a co-producer, and two are only Spanish including *Una pistola en cada mano* (*A Gun in Each Hand*, Cesc Gay, 2012). The high numbers of co-productions and productions with/in Spain in Darín's recent filmography, including the recent phenomenally successful *Relatos Salvaje/Savage Tales*, (Damián Szifrón, 2014), which broke box office records in Argentina and earned \$27 million world-wide, make Darín a star in both local (Argentine) *and* international (Spanish) markets. Indeed as John Hopwell points out in relation to his casting in *Relatos Salvajes*, Darín is enough of a name actor in Spain and Argentina to sell a film both territories (2013).

Although a unique national star in Argentina (in 2011 he won the Konex Foundation Diamond Award as the most influential and distinguished personality in the entertainment industry), Darín's film performances in predominantly big budgeted mainstream films are in many ways outside the dominant critical trend in Argentine cinema: New Argentine Cinema pursues a politics of (an anonymous) face and body and prefers to use nonprofessional performers who can bring a sense of authenticity rather than performativity to film acting (Aguilar 2008: 209). New Argentine films like *La ciénaga/The Swamp* (Lucrecia Martel 2001) seek to denaturalize acting and outwardly reject melodrama (Gundermann 2005: 258). Although *Nueve Reinas* has been folded into the ideological aims of the New Argentine Cinema, Darín's work in

it and films like *Hijo de la novia/ Son of the Bride* (Campanella 2000) and, *Luna de Avellaneda/ Avellaneda's Moon* (Campanella 2004) is perceived as much more commercial, and much more a part of the both mainstream Argentine and international cinema. In contrast to the non-performativity of New Argentine Cinema, Darín's stardom is based precisely on the expressiveness of *his* face, which since his first important hit *Nueve Reinas* has become his trademark.

Darín's face, which is increasingly focused on in his post 2000 films is key to the way he embodies a new Argentine middle-aged man. Different to a previous generation of actors whose careers peaked in the 1990s (Miguel Ángel Solá, Héctor Alterio, and Federico Luppi) and who personified a tough and straightforward middle-aged man emasculated by the neoliberal shift that took place in the Menem era (Rocha 2012: 16), Darin communicates through his face and in particular through his eyes. These add a layer of complexity, depth and vulnerability to his star persona (Andermann, 2012: 133), and express a masculinity that is more thoughtful and analytical than that of male stars of previous generations.

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Darín began acting on television at the tender age of three, worked in *telenovelas* throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and in the theatre during most of his life. He also starred in a series of popular films for the Argentine production company Aries Cinematográfica two of which were directed by Adolfo Aristarain *La playa del amor* (*Love Beach*, 1980) and *La discoteca del amor* (*Love Disco*, 1980) that helped to solidify the "galancito" (young "galán," handsome eligible, sex symbol) status he acquired in *telenovelas* such as *Ayer fue mentira* (*Yesterday Was a Lie*, Canal 9, 1975). Although he received some recognition for his early films, it was not until

Nueve reinas that he began to register as a star in Spanish-language markets. *Nueve reinas* was a landmark film, that grossed over \$12 million worldwide (Alvaray 2008: 53), and marked a new phase in the actor's career that coincided with increases in co-productions, and better distribution practices and consequent success of Argentine cinema in international markets. It was as much these industrial shifts as the particular qualities of Darín's face and acting abilities that made him a staple of Argentina's domestic cinema (particularly as seen from the global art cinema market) and ushered in a new era in his career as a versatile transatlantic middle-aged star.

Clara Garavelli suggests that between 1994 and 2012, as Darín becomes a star there's a shift in both his publicity shots and how he is framed by the camera, from predominantly medium shots to predominantly close-ups (2015: 422). Following Garavelli, we can see that in *Nueve reinas* shots of Darín's character –Marcos-- as he cons his way through a variety of scenarios, focus on his head and face and consequently emphasize both that he is performing and his character's untrustworthiness. The film opens at an Esso station when Juan (Gastón Paul) tries to cheat the clerk. In this scene Marcos' profile in close-up observes the exchange from behind the aisle before he steps in to rescue Juan, highlighting the character's actorly feigning whilst simultaneously focusing on the actor's good looking face. Marcos-- remains an actor for most of the film (indeed the film is about acting itself), with close-ups reinforcing the fact that he is always acting with his face. Only at the end does the film unveil a "true" Marcos, when he returns from the bank, his face bloodied and without the money. He turns to Juan who walks off in (feigned) disgust.

There's a similar focus on shots of the character's/Darín's face in Bielinsky's *El aura* (2004). Darín plays Estebán, a quiet and reserved taxidermist who suffers from epilepsy but who also has a photographic memory. This ability is emphasized in a key moment through close ups of Estebán's face witnessing a crime. Bielinsky sets up characteristics in both *Nueves Reinas* and *El aura* that establish the kinds of roles that characterize Darín's subsequent career, making him not just a "catchy face" (Garavelli 2013: 24) but also an attentive observer with penetrating eyes that are hiding a secret.

Other directors (Juan José Campanella and Pablo Trapero), who frequently cast Darín in their movies, make similar use of his eyes. *El secreto de sus ojos*, the fourth produced with Campanella, tells the tale of a writer, Benjamín (Darín) who attempts to solve a mystery after twenty-five years. The film reconstructs the case through flashbacks as Benjamín attempts to write it down in a novel. The film focuses on Benjamín's face when he is writing often lingering on his eyes (Rocha 2014: 10). Near the end of the film when he is driving away from Morales' house (the victim's husband), shots of Benjamín behind the wheel are cross cut with his thoughts and flashbacks. When he remembers Morales' words "don't think anymore" all the pieces of the case/puzzle start to fit together. The camera then closes in on his face and lingers until we see his eyes at the moment of understanding. The scene brilliantly exemplifies the characterization of Darín as an analytical thinker, who works through the past to recreate the present and eventually solves the mystery.

This emphasis on Darín's face particularly his piercing eyes continues in his more recent work signaling his role as; witness in *Elefante blanco/ White Elephant*

(Trapero, 2012), analytical thinker in *Carancho* (*Vulture*, Pablo Trapero 2010), modern day detective in *Tesis sobre un homicidio* (*Thesis on a Homicide*, Hernán Goldfrid, 2012) and perceptive observer *Un cuento chino* (*Chinese Takeout*, Antonio Llorens, 2011). In all of these instances Darín's nuanced facial expression draws us constantly to his eyes as the locus of meaning.

The combination of the shots of Darín's face and eyes across his oeuvre is even more calculated in *Delirium*-- a self-conscious and self-referential exploration of both his "star image" (Dyer 1998: 62) and the many complexities of his on and off screen persona during the post-*Nueve reinas* era. It features three friends, Federico, Mariano, and Martín who decide to liven up their dull lives and gain instant wealth and fame by making a "New Argentine" film. They approach the "big star" "Darín" (who plays himself) to help them achieve this goal but accidentally kill him early in the shoot. To cover their tracks, they arrange to leak to the press footage that suggests that "Darín" is leaving Argentina. "Darín's" suspicious disappearance leads to a national crisis when Susana Giménez (TV personality and Darín's real-life partner for nine years) appears on TV as the president of Argentina, trying to alleviate the chaos and demands "Darín's" return.

Delirium initially reinforces the on and off screen characterization of Darín as the "guy next door" (Garavelli 2015; Urraca 2014: 359) when one of the filmmakers refers to him as "un tipo común" ("a common man") and "Darín" agrees to work on the low-budget production because he (mistakenly) believes he knows Federico's family. And yet "Darín's" celebrity-like behavior on set contradicts the "guy next door" type. When he first arrives to meet the filmmakers he wears an ascot, which

paints him as pretentious. During filming he makes so many demands that the filmmakers proclaim “que no se haga la Estrella” (“he shouldn’t act like such prima donna”). In addition to being about the making of a “New Argentine Film”, *Delirium*, consciously identifies itself as a new Argentine film but also plays with some of the movement’s central tenets. For instance, it casts three unknown and deliberately under-acted performers who provide the kind of access to the “real” experiences of the everyday that the movement so values, alongside a professional, melodramatic actor (Darín). This injection of the “real,” that is so central to the mythos of New Argentine Cinema ironically also happens in the slippage between Darín and the version he plays of himself, “Darín.” This perpetual self-reflexive exercise of Darín’s presence in the film reveals an obsession with performance that clearly distances “Darín” from this “guy next door” public persona and makes him a less ordinary and more exceptional presence. The film makes clear that “Darín” is a star but makes fun of his analytical thinker star persona that is so often embodied by the frequent close up (across his oeuvre) on his eyes. In *Delirium* the extreme close-up of his eyes (showcasing him “thinking”) happens ironically only when he is lying dead and gazing sightlessly into the camera.

The recurring close-ups of Darín’s familiar face particularly those of his unique and distinctive eyes in his post *Nueve reinas* career indicate not just the slightly vulnerable and thoughtful new Argentine middle age man but also trace the influence of (his early career in) television. To a certain extent, the excessive focus on his face and eyes post-2000 also fossilize his star image for Argentine audiences. He remains frozen in the local imagination even as he co-exists and becomes a star in transnational markets.

From the above discussion and analyses of three exemplary star discourses, it seems Latin American stardom cannot exist without a necessary external axis of production/consumption and distribution. There are, however, also some telling differences among the career paths of Braga, Bernal and Darín. Braga and Bernal are evidently constrained in their choice of roles by their Latin Americanness/ethnicity when they work outside their country of origin. Despite this, Braga has stayed away from Brazil and been criticized for it whereas Bernal has managed to shift easily back and forth between US/European and Latin American industries without ever seeming to leave Mexico. Darín, on the other hand, has rejected the idea of ever working in Hollywood.

What seems most interesting contemporaneously in these three star studies, and a useful avenue of future research, is how and whether Latin American stardom will continue to shift as more and more Latin American stars are courted and continue to work in US television. Moura is currently appearing in Netflix production *Narcos*. Mexican Demián Bechir has been in *Weeds* (2008-2010) and *The Bridge* (2013-2014) and Bernal appears in season three of *Mozart in the Jungle*. For a star system with its local beginnings in television this move suggests Latin American stardom is coming in (a kind of) full circle.

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